

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 070843

FOR DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY ARMITAGE

FOLLOWING REPEAT ROME 4822 SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO BELGRADE
ZAGREB TRIESTE BY POUCH DATED APRIL 5.

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 4822

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IT, YO

SUBJECT: ITALO-YUGOSLAV DISPUTE OVER ZONE B

REF: A. STATE 67512 B. STATE 68206 C. ROME 4819

1. FOLLOWING ARE EMBASSY COMMENTS ON INR ASSESSMENT CONTAINED
REFTELS.

2. WE BELIEVE SECTION ON BACKGROUND IS APPROPRIATE FOR DOCUMENT
WHICH WILL BE DISSEMINATED. DEPARTMENT IS AWARE, HOWEVER, FROM
OUR REPORTING (ROME 3867 EXDIS, ROME 3703 - 1973 NODIS), OF
WORKING LEVEL FOLLOW-UP MINIC/MEDICIC TALKS IN DUBROVNIK
IN 1973. FOR DOMESTIC POLITICAL REASONS, ITALIANS HAVE
CONSISTENTLY ENJOINED US TO TREAT EVEN THE EXISTENCE OF SECRET
TALKS WITH UTMOST SENSITIVITY. AS WE REPORTED, ITALIANS
HAVE TOLD US THAT TALKS FOUNDERED ON YUGOSLAV ADAMANT
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REFUSAL TO CONSIDER EVEN MINOR TERRITORIAL RECTIFICATIONS

IN RETURN FOR GOI RECOGNITION OF YUGOSLAV SOVEREIGNTY OVER ZONE B. SUCH BORDER ADJUSTMENTS WERE NECESSARY, ACCORDING TO OUR SOURCES, TO SELL PACKAGE TO ITALIAN PARLIAMENT AND PUBLIC. MOREOVER, FONOFF HAS TOLD US THAT YUGOSLAVS DURING COURSE OF TALKS HAD HINTED SEVERAL TIMES THAT, IN ABSENCE OF PROGRESS, THEY MIGHT BE FORCED TO MAKE FACT OF TALKS PUBLIC.

3. AS TO SEQUENCE OF EVENTS LEADING TO CURRENT REVIVAL OF TENSIONS, WE AGREE THAT RECORD IS NOT ENTIRELY CLEAR. IT SEEMS OBVIOUS THAT ITALIAN FONOFF OFFICIALS WERE NOT COMPLETELY CANDID WITH EMBASSY ON CERTAIN POINTS DURING EARLY STAGES OF DISPUTE. HOWEVER, FONOFF NOW HAS CONFIRMED TO US THAT TANJUG APRIL 4 VERSION OF EVENTS IS ESSENTIALLY ACCURATE. ROME REFTEL PROVIDES ITALIAN SLANT ON THESE EVENTS AS WELL AS RATIONALE FOR GOI DECISIONS TAKEN IN AFTERMATH OF YUGOSLAV ERECTION OF SIGNS. IN REWRITE OF PARA 2 REFTEL A WHICH WE ASSUME WILL BE REQUIRED IN LIGHT OF TANJUG ACCOUNT OF EVENTS AND REFTEL C, ASSESSMENT SHOULD ALSO DROP WORD "FORMER" WHEN DESCRIBING ZONE B.

4. AS REGARDS ANALYSIS OF MOTIVATION CONTAINED IN PARA 3 REFTEL A, WE AGREE THAT PROXIMATE CAUSE OF CURRENT PHASE OF DISPUTE WAS ERECTION OF SIGNS IN LATE JANUARY. ITALIAN EXPLANATION, WHICH STRIKES US AS PLAUSIBLE OF CONSIDERATION MOTIVATING YUGOSLAV ACTION INCLUDE (A) A PERCEIVED WEAKNESS OF ITALIAN GOVERNMENT; (B) THE IMPASSE REACHED DURING SECRET TALKS IN DECEMBER AND DEPARTURE OF ITALIAN NEGOTIATOR ON ASSIGNMENT TO CAIRO; AND (C) THE REFUSLA (FOR FEAR OF ADDITIONAL PRESSURE TO SETTLE ZONE B QUESTION ON YUGOSLAV TERMS) OF RUMOR AND MORO TO RECEIVE THE YUGOSLAV AMBASSADOR FOR A NUMBER OF MONTHS FOLLOWING FORMATION OF RUMOR GOVERNMENT IN SUMMER OF 1973. IN ADDITION, OF COURSE, THERE ARE LIKELY INTERNAL YUGOSLAV REASONS WHY BELGRADE TRIGGERED THE ISSUE AT THIS TIME.

5. AS DEPARTMENT AWARE, PARAMOUNT ITALIAN CONCERN FOR MANY YEARS HAS BEEN TO MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONS WITH BELGRADE AND TO KEEP TERRITORIAL ISSUE ON AS LOW A BURNER AS POSSIBLE AND OUT OF PUBLIC GAZE. GIVEN EMOTIONAL CONTENT OF ISSUE WITH CERTAIN SECTORS OF ITALIAN PUBLIC OPINION AND IN PARLIAMENT, GOI HAS STRONGLY PREFERRED TO MAINTAIN THE STATUS QUO. HOWEVER, CONFIDENTIAL

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IN RESPONSE TO CONSTANT YUGOSLAV PRESSURE, AND DESPITE STRONG DOMESTIC OPPOSITION FROM SOME QUARTERS INCLUDING PART OF CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY, GOI HAS AGREED OVER PAST YEARS TO SERIES OF HIGHLY SECRET TALKS DESIGNED TO FIND BASIS FOR RESOLUTION OF ZONE B ISSUE. GOI REASONING HAS BEEN THAT IF YUGOSLAVS SHOW DISPOSITION TO GRANT SOME MINOR, FACE-SAVING BORDER RECTIFICATIONS TO THE NORTH OF ZONE A, IN EXCHANGE FOR ITALIAN RECOGNITION OF YUGOSLAV SOVEREIGNTY OVER

ZONE B, GOI COULD THEN AT OPPORTUNE MOMENT CONFIDENTLY PRESENT NEGOTIATED PACKAGE, INVOLVING CONCESSIONS ON BOTH SIDES, TO ITALIAN PUBLIC. STUMBLING BLOCK HAS BEEN CONSISTENT, AND IN ITALIAN VIEW, PUZZLING, YUGOSLAV REFUSAL TO MAKE SLIGHTEST CONCESSION IN THESE TALKS.

6. DESPITE ECONOMIC AND OTHER DIFFICULTIES BESETTING ITALIAN GOVERNMENT AND GOI SENSITIVITY TO PUBLIC AND APRLIAMENTARY OPINION ON ZONE B ISSUE, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THESE FACTORS HAVE PLAYED DETERMINING ROEL IN CURRENT DISPUTE. ITALIAN DECISION TO RESPOND TO ERECTION OF SIGNS WITH NOTE CLAIMING RESIDUAL SOVEREIGNTY OVER ZONE B, WAS WE BELIEVE, MADE MAINLY FOR THE RECORD TO AVOID ANY APPEARANCE OF TACIT ACCEPTANCE OF WHAT APPEARED AS A LIKELY BEGINNING OF YUGOSLAV EFFORT TO ASSERT SOVEREIGNTY OVER DISPUTED AREA BY SALAMI TACTICS. WE DO NOT SEE LANGUAGE IN MARCH 11 NOTE SOLELY AS EFFORT TO DISARM RIGHT WING PRESSURE. GOI INITIAL WILLINGNESS TO SETTLE FOR ORAL PROTEST IS EVIDENCE THAT, RATHER THAN SEE ISSUE BLOWN UP, ROME MUCH PREFERRED TO SEE IT QUIETLY BURIED. ITALIAN ATTITUDE SINCE THEN, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF MARCH 11 NOTE, HAS SEEMED TO US TO CONFIRM THIS ATTITUDE. IF IT CAN BE SAID THAT GOI MARCH 11 NOTE DEMONSTRATED ITALIAN MISJUDGMENT OF YUGOSLAV SITUATION, THEN ERECTING SIGNS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF WEAK ITALIAN GOVERNMENT SHOULD PROBABLY BE PLACE IN SAME CATEGORY. WE AGREE THAT IT WILL BE DIFFICULT FOR EITHER SIDE TO BACK DOWN AT THIS POINT, PARTICULARLY AGAINST BACKGROUND OF CONTINUING PUBLIC POLEMICS ISSUING FROM BELGRADE.

7. WITH REGARD TO QUESTION RAISED REFTEL B CONCERNING ERECTION OF SIGNS, BOTH AMCONSUL TRIESTE AND FONOFF TELL US THAT, PRIOR TO ERECTION OF SIGNS IN LATE JANUARY, THERE WERE NO REPEAT NO SIGNS ON YUGOSLAV SIDE OF DEMARCATION LINE. ONLY MARKERS WERE STONES INSCRIBED IN BOTH LANGUAGES BEARING LEGEND "LONDON CONFIDENTIAL

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MEMORANDUM - 1954" IN ACCORDANCE WITH 1957 LJUBLJANA AGREEMENT FIXING DEMARCATION LINES. FURTHER EVIDENCE CASTING DOUBT ON PETKOVIC ASSERTION IS FACT THAT THERE IS ONLY ONE SIGN AT EACH CROSSING POINT CONTAINING BOTH NOTATIONS "SFR JUGOSLAVIA" ABOVE AND "SR SLOVENIA" BELOW. VOLPE UNQUOTE RUSH

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